

Wilkes, K. (2006) Using grounded theory to model heritage visitor experiences: methodological and practical issues. *Qualitative Market Research An International Journal* **9** (4)

Purpose ?

The purpose of this paper is to present grounded theory as an alternative approach for conceptualizing and modelling the consumer experience. The basic theoretical tenets of the grounded theory approach are contrasted with more traditional assumptions and methods used in consumer research.

Design/methodology/approach ?

The approach is based on qualitative methods and a series of systematic ethnographic procedures, which along with the simultaneous processes of data collection and analysis, lead to the development of an inductive derived grounded theory of the visitor experience. In order to develop a model of the interactive experience of visitors to heritage sites, case studies are conducted at three World Heritage Sites in Thailand.

Findings ?

The findings indicate that the grounded theory approach has the potential to reveal a rich and deep understanding of visitor experiences, including the ways that visitors interact with the site, their interpretation of the site, and the meaning of the site for them.

Practical implications ?

It is suggested that the grounded theory approach can be a valuable tool in exploring the insights and meanings of visitors' experience and could be applied to future research in consumer behaviour. There are practical implications of this kind of research for the management of heritage sites in terms of visitor expectations, interactions and interpretations.

Originality/value ?

This study has developed a model of the experience and interaction of visitors to Thai World Heritage Sites which could be applied to other heritage sites. It illustrates the theoretical and practical issues of grounded theory approach to exploration and inductive development ?interactive experience? of visitors at heritage sites. This is a qualitative research approach that could be adopted for a range of experience based industries such tourism, leisure and hospitality.